

DELTA

No. 3

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delta

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PHILIP HOBSBAUM edited the poetry, and MILES ATTERTON edited the magazine. They are grateful to all those who helped in the production and distribution of this issue of delta. Contributions for the Autumn issue should be sent with a stamped addressed envelope, to the Editor at Downing College, Cambridge.

EDITORIAL

Good verse should need no editorial. One is here because so sudden a change in "delta's" editorial policy as the present requires some explanation. "delta" is no longer trying to be just another University magazine. There are here no big names, no distinguished "outside" contributors. With one Oxford exception, all the verse is from Cambridge.

In the past, University magazines have tended more to the building of unreal reputations and the exhibition of popular poses than to the publication of responsible verse. "delta" is an attempt towards a remedy for this. Such poems printed here as "Joseph of Arimathea" and "The Collector" (which seem to the editor excellent minor poems) require reading and criticism at a serious level. The unavoidable omission from this issue of verse by Geoffrey Strickland (whose recent work has shown an integrity unusual in our unstable society) the editor particularly regrets. Since there is no non-literary attempt to bolster up the work here offered, whether "delta" even partially succeeds in its aims depends upon the availability of intelligent contributors and an interested reading public.

There is within these covers no Great Poem of the Month! The editor has tried to collect verse which has immediacy, definition, and contact with reality—verse which combines validity of experience with qualities that, in a more settled age than ours, would perhaps be called "classical". Undergraduates seem to write better light than serious verse. That is why, for instance, "A Cultivated Gathering", "The Two Lovers", and "Epitaph on a First-Class Mind" are included. The editor realises that he has nothing distinctively major; he has rather aimed at poems interesting in a minor way. Cloudy pseudo-philosophizing and decaying romanticism will, it is hoped, not be found here.

Further issues will take a slightly different form from this one, and will include criticism.

PHILIP HOBBSBAUM.

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

“ From the west I come, with toil and trial
For you, Britain, and with grace I bring pain:
For you, who have with demons and devils lain
Long, I bring these two holy vials;
And this staff, which you see sudden in growing,
Shall guide you to build a place of holiness
As a sign that after my long weariness
I and you rest, in waiting and knowing;
Certain, without necessity of showing.”

The hill lay back and watched, feeling
The staff push and tangle roots
Down to its bones, and, as fresh shoots
Curled out, exploring and wheeling
Into the sky, the roots, stealing
Downwards, netted the solid earth
As swaddling clothes for the soil's birth.

“ People of Glastonbury, come and build
Your church, build it lasting, squat, and strong,
So that, while we, who meditate so long,
Reach up to God, you, who have always tilled
The soil here, may leave your tools, and gather:
So that, leaving the praise of labour:—sowing
And reaping, watching the new crops growing,
Milking the cows, and curing the leather,
Your hands and our words may praise together.”

The hill lay back still, watching the sky,
And the church and the thorn tree
Growing together, and slowly
It felt the roots grope with shy
Tender exploration, low
Down at its heart, while the plough
Cut and furrowed its brow.

DAVID EWART

MAUSOLEUM

Did ever Mausolus have such a tomb?

Can the slow Egyptian slaves have ever dragged
The heavy stones for such a pyramid?
The low, oppressive sky stands on the city,
With smoke-filled impassivity excludes,
And guards the dead within from penetration
Of brash, corrupting, country air or sun.

The ingrown and perverted earth is sealed
With rock and ruin, sooty parks and railings,
Topped with expensive statues, bony towers
Sticking their ugly unresponsive noses
Into the unexpressed business of the sky.

Can Christ or King, tyrant, pharaoh, emperor
Pay for so many priests, hope for so many
Mourning and ministering at his grave
While the traffic sings its heavy incantation
And sirens wail in sudden hopelessness?

Less than a tomb, less than temple, dungeon,
Stony emptiness or bleary bomb-site,
This is the vomit-spot of all the gay dogs
And the persuasive glib industrialists
That lionized the local stock exchange
And built their gowky rows of offices
With awkward and obscene magnificence.

Yet always, without flinching, they return to it.

DAVID EWART

THE TWO LOVERS

"My love is a queen, a priestess
Of ancient mysteries, tall and fair."
"Nothing more? I love a woman
With breasts and arms and legs—yes, legs!"
"She is a mist of memories
With white linen robes and golden hair."
"And she is worried about ladders
In her stockings and the price of eggs."
"Nothing more?" "Nothing more." And yet
Like Cordelia he was lying
With too much truth, and went home sighing.

DAVID WARD

PROVINCIAL CAFE

The pattern is unchanged, we use
last year's conversational style;
even the cultural clichés, like the coffee
are synthetic.

It is all as inevitable as death and
somewhat similar.

Around us gentility rattles like embarrassed spoons but
as the time passes and the busy tongues grow warm,
slipping its jealous leash, the flat midland accent triumphs.
One wishes even that the orchestra would play, or
some volcano purify our bones from speech.

ROBERT ARNOLD

A CULTIVATED GATHERING

About the lawns the cultured figures stand
Brilliantly talking cultivated prose;
Such witty stylish conversation goes
Well with the pretty horticultured land.

The clever vistas image clever thoughts,
Show them the artful patterns they can make,
Prove art depends upon the pains you take
To nurse the nice plants, weed out wilder sorts.

Between the shrubs they argue for a whim
Well knowing which conclusions they will pick;
Words that will come so easy and so quick
Show that they clip their thinking very trim.

It takes some time to cultivate such knacks—
No shrub becomes a peacock overnight.
But even when it has the figure right
There are still certain beauties that it lacks:

Shrub peacocks cannot flash out gorgeous tails,
Flash out their tails in fans of dazzling fire;
And some bright thinkers burn with a desire
To find out where their clever gardening fails.

The mental shrubbery that they have made
Is ornamental when the lawns are flat;
But if the ground grew more involved than that
Such soothing level lawns could not be laid.

And now a rising wind obscures the talk,
And rising ground shuts out the neat scene,
Terrible jungle springs where shrubs had been—
But there, between the trees, bright peacocks walk.

RICHARD DRAIN

TRUE CONFESSIONS

You know you were often here before,
Watching the slack Thames water rise and rinse
The staleness of the river-mouth. There once
Seemed hope you would be able to explore
Your gritty vision less banally, find
Joy, say, in some image: '*great cranes which tense
And then stoop like mechanical giraffes*'.
You thought quite wrongly that this made no sense.

You had to consult, when coming before,
The revised time-table of natural law
Which specifies the change in services.
For this your knowledge of the latest score
Was quite invaluable. It was less strain
You found, of course, to keep up this pretence—
This facetious awe of safety limits
That mark a flat world off from lack of sense.

You cannot conceal your visits here, for
It took you time at first to sterilise
Each thought, when learning to emasculate
Sincerity. It was not long before
You borrowed slickness from the conjuror.
And yet, it was an unnatural offence:
Does this explain the false alibi of
Your pose, cauterising the lack of sense?

How often also were you here before,
Facing some similar paralysis
Of intention? Rehearsal always makes
Your nausea at deceit the stand-in for
A pantomime lead of naivety.
But playing hostage to experience
Soon palls: it leaves you thinking you prefer
The shadow-screen, where there's less risk of sense.

DAVID GRENIER

THE COLLECTOR

Caught in a fold of living hills he failed,
For, out of his childhood, he had wandered on
An alien soil;
Extending his amiable senses, he found them blind.

The senses still, the reason kept its sway;
Nothing could be of conscious choice but still he chose
Observations made to stir him in default of love.
And thus the beauty and the terror of his life
Moved him mildly. This living landscape where before
He failed, was absorbing, with the horny rocks and the
Mist that glittered like a skin,
And with reasonable curiosity he saw
Crows fall from the sky, lilac tongues
Of death in the square-cut hedge; such omens
Were full of interest.

A busy life it was, watching the people with the
Gay clothes and the lives whipped like tops;
The tongued folk who burned with
The fire that warmed his watching.

At the end, as he would have wished, the Divine
Fingers plucked him from this skin
With much pain for both;
For he was interested in his illness,
And the world, strange to relate, had grown fond of him.

PETER REDGROVE

THE TRIAL

Memory, in drawing to acknowledge a parting's
sorrow, burns silently in the brain
that sews this pattern of complaint
tear-rusted trials of endless rehearsal
ground out in salt-choked funerals, slow nodding
back to back of great identities, receding
patterns of sweet satisfaction's second best:
muffled procession in strait neural precedence
fixed in sorrow, incomplete.

Heard in strict silence, strait-jacket briefs
pleading how worthless is the essential
employ no embroidery of sound, no velvet touch,
deny the impact of the absent sense.
A reprieve of sense is unlikely to endure
prepared by thin maiden typists, upright
like unplayed harps, unseen officials
directing moral quanta. The wistful side
builds tiered towers of anxious plastic
on plots so far unquarreled.

Meeting strips the mechanism, leaves unplayed
the unstilled trial, the shattered babe.

PETER REDGROVE

GUARDIAN

He was a good husband to his family
And to his home; a fine business-man certainly,
He saw to his property and to his solid home; his family life
He saw to it first, provided first
Of all for his family and for his wife.
There was no question that he married without love,
It was incumbent on him (he saw to it first)
To the community in which he had settled his life,
A proper duty to these children and their kindly mother
The full-rigged ship for his last adventure,
This settlement, the correct furniture
Without which he could not plant the dedicated grove.

Hunched in his black coat like the agricultural crow
He haggled over property and bought the ground,
He had his background of experience and there he found
That his family would never dare to follow.
Rare in this age, a tradition of service,
(The king's gardener, son man and boy),
He gladly assumed their ancient responsibility
In the twilight of his life, by his own choice.

Dragged in the portly soil the seed of green
By the virtue of his own and the sun's green fingers
A harmless hobby reared the nodding stately assembly,
A place in whose service fine wits grew lean,
In which no breath of mechanism ever lingered.

In time a god grew there, and spoke to him sometimes
From the tall temples. From his own image
Of a glimmer of white collar in a dark patronage
Of shuttered leaves; or of a black fly busied on a green pane;
He brought himself to see the thickness of a great tree
Rippling out through time like a rod thrust into water,
A marrow to these segmental days and hours
Passed in the world through his aged body,
Like a backbone scaled through thin fingertips.

They now regarded it all as an intolerable folly
In the domestic shade; and at pain of his liberty
They would constrain him to tell his sacred story.
But when he would tell, the tender god hid
And would not be discovered again among the flowers.

He would have mourned the trees like flutes to his lips:
—Broad-chested against the wind of the morning,
Sewn out of dirt, green capes against the weather,
White birds among trees, seen in the springtime,
Hung out on a bodice of black branches,
Consorts to the white fountains sobbing in the garden,
Shaped and sharpened by the departed form
Stand my trees, emptied of godhead.—

But most cruelly beset the frost of such enquiry
Chilled the red rose of brain which grew
Cradled in the snow-white bower of his dedicated bone.
And so it passed that the sound of his last expiration
Should be content with this sorry evasion:
—Lay me like a sword in my own garden,
Among the turning leaves; I wish to remain
A monument to the proper action of sun and of rain.—

PETER REDGROVE

T R E A T Y

Two kingdoms are at peace within this bed.
The frontiers broached at last, two rulers can
Explore the landscapes their reporters said
Existed in a different beauty from
The countryside behind the skull that ran
Familiar to each back to the womb.

I for my part as king did not believe
Your private lands held anything for me.
For months I obstinate would never leave
My own criteria to understand
The personal delight that kept you free
To scorn inclusion in another land,

Where summer hurls its stars around the dance
A tall cool girl lit with a music hand,
Where one smooth pillar fallen from the once
In isolation splendid temple lies
Embedded in its own destruction and
Dark birds delude horizons with their cries.

A hand to guide you to an autumn knelt
Around two figures you shook off. Your ear
You turned away from whispered scenes I felt
Would please you—flowers underneath the arm,
The branches curved with presents and a spear
Cast down to save the gifted one from harm.

Through my own window on to your estate
The cold uninterrupted flow of sky
Mimicked in ruthless narcissism the state
Of frozen woods—an echo region where
Impassive in controlled maturity
The trees could glass their winter gold of hair.

My mind threw back into my eyes its own
Sick vanity. Why should a ruler leave
The privacy of dominance, step down
To subject status made inferior
By patronage and pine in chains of love?
Not ice but freedom is superior.

For my mistake was imposition of
Two lands upon my thought of minds. And not
Could I accept ideas of take and give
Until you dawned me in your arms to see
In our exchange of ecstasy that what
You wanted was a bare diplomacy.

And now we run through one another's lands
And finding contours in equality
Bathe in discovery, fruit in our hands
And fountains playing in the mouth. And this
Our contribution only that to be
In June relationship there freedom is.

HARRY GUEST

A TROPICAL CHILDHOOD

In the hot noons I heard the fusillade
As soldiers on the range learnt how to kill,
Used my toy microscope whose lens arrayed
The twenty rainbows in a parrot's quill.

Or once, while I was swimming in the bay,
The guns upon the other, seaward shore
Began a practice-shoot; the angry spray
Fountained above the point at every roar.

Then I, in the calm water, dived to chase
Pennies my father threw me, searched the sand
For the brown disc a yard beneath my face.
And never tried to see beyond my hand.

That was the time when a dead grasshopper
Devoured by ants before my captive eye
Made the sun dark, yet distant battles were
Names in a dream, outside geography.

J. E. M. LUCIE-SMITH

PLAGUE YEAR

I have insufficient memory
For sound; thought basking
On a rock near waters
Dark and sunless, heavy
With the wooden call of birds.

I have eyes hard-coated
Sightless; dust rising vast,
Clouds of some thousand ages.
Clamour of funeral bells
Near the clocks of fallen cities.

I have a voice wrinkled
Dry, like leaf; no pain, nor
Suffering, nothing remains
But linen touch of years
And flesh dishevelled by bone.

I have experienced decay
Withering of flesh and bone.
Near, the wooden carts drag
Heavily to death a shape—
Some fallen tree, a shadow of a man.

G. L. NICOL

EPITAPH ON A 1ST CLASS MIND

His living soon became mimesis,
His thoughts, stilled bacchanals arranged with skill
Around a cold sarcophagus, until
His present grew a stale hypothesis.

Yet, in slow Aegeans of words, his innocence
Became as sea-light slanting to the foamy
Flesh of Grecian boys: action was sophistry
Knowing a soul sucked under by a cadence.

RODNEY BANISTER.



